

National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection

Risk Based Inspection Systems Focus Group Briefing

Purpose

This briefing serves to update the National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection on the Risk-Based Inspection Systems Focus Group sessions from April 24 – May 2, 2006. The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) carried out this outreach effort through a transparent process of listening to the ideas and suggestions of its own field employees, who will be responsible for carrying out a successful RBIS.

Background

Focus groups were held in Atlanta, Georgia, Beltsville, Maryland, and twice over the internet through Verizon's Net Meeting software. The sessions were organized into two parts. The first part included a recorded PowerPoint presentation relating to risk-based inspection. The presentation was similar to that presented by Phil Derfler at the last National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection in November 2005. The presentation allowed the participants to gain some background information on the concept. The second part of the session was a series of questions posed to the group addressing the following six issues.

- Anticipating Problems
- Risk-Based Inspection Factors
- Work to be Done
- Design of Inspection Activities
- Response to Findings
- Continuing Communication with Employees

Discussion

Field employees expressed the desire to be consistently "heard" and to receive all FSIS information and notices in a timely manner. They want to see an even more successful farm-to-table process. All interviewed participants demonstrated a dedicated commitment to protecting the nation's public health. They were, however, concerned about the need for more resources and improving their internet access in the field to deal with the data they would need in a risk based system. This will help them receive important information in a timely manner.

There was general consensus that FSIS needs to capture more plant records and data including information on "in-house" laboratory tests. Participants felt that FSIS needs to better address *salmonella* risks as well as chemical hazards in a new system. In addition, there were several comments addressing concerns on "looking upstream" to deal with

distribution issues in a new system including concerns about temperature abuse in shipping.

The participants felt the current system provided them a measure of flexibility but agreed more flexibility and additional training to support the changes were important. There seemed to be general agreement that intensifying inspection in response to non-compliance was good. However, there were a variety of concerns and comments on how that would work given the wide variety of systems and products in different plants. Basically, how will FSIS define good control?

The participants' valued opinions will only boost our programs and improve communication between Headquarters and the field. The end result will be not only a success for FSIS, but an improvement in the nation's public health.

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